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SUBJECT: IRELAND CONSIDERING APPROACH TO LEBANON CONFERENCE

REF: STATE 2781

(SBU) The Irish Government is in a position to pledge funds to Lebanon at the January 25 Conference in Paris, but has not yet determined an amount, according to Dermot McGauran, Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa, to whom Pol/Econ Chief delivered reftel demarche on January 12. McGauran noted that a Paris pledge would add to the euro 1.5 million that Ireland had provided to Lebanon in 2006 through various channels. He added that the Irish Government would most likely send a representative to the Paris conference, but had not decided who. McGauran emphasized that Irish involvement in Lebanon stretched back to 1978, when Irish troops took part in the original UNIFIL mission. Between 1980 and 2001, 47 Irish soldiers died in the course of UNIFIL service, he recounted. He also pointed out that there were now 150 Irish soldiers in the reconstituted UNIFIL force, as part of a Finnish-Irish battalion. This latest troop contribution, McGauran said, embodied Ireland's continuing commitment to Lebanon.

BENTON